



LEXICAL ATTRITION AND GENERATIONAL LANGUAGE COMPETENCE IN DAWOODI SPEAKERS

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Abstract

This study examines lexical attrition in Dawoodi by analyzing generational differences in vocabulary retention, semantic depth, and lexical accessibility. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines elicitation tasks, structured interviews, and corpus-based frequency analysis derived from recorded speech data. The findings demonstrate a marked disparity between elder fluent speakers and younger semi-speakers, with the latter exhibiting significant gaps in culturally embedded vocabulary, particularly in domains such as kinship systems, traditional occupations, and oral storytelling practices. The study reveals that lexical attrition in Dawoodi is not merely a reduction in vocabulary size but involves a qualitative shift in meaning-making processes. Younger speakers tend to replace Dawoodi lexical items with borrowed or dominant-language equivalents, resulting in semantic flattening and loss of cultural nuance. This shift is closely linked to reduced exposure, changing language attitudes, and identity reconfiguration within the community. Furthermore, the research highlights the role of lexical competence as a key indicator of language vitality, arguing that lexical erosion precedes and accelerates broader structural decline. By situating Dawoodi within global discussions on language attrition and endangerment, the paper underscores the need for targeted lexical documentation and pedagogical interventions. The findings contribute to theoretical and applied linguistics by demonstrating how lexical loss functions as both a symptom and a driver of language endangerment, reinforcing the urgency of preservation strategies focused on intergenerational transmission.

Keywords: *Lexical Attrition, Language Shift, Language Endangerment, Generational Language Competence, Dawoodi Language, Indigenous Language.*

1. Introduction

Language endangerment is not an abrupt collapse but a gradual erosion, often beginning at the lexical level before permeating deeper structural domains. Within the broader discourse of language shift, lexical attrition has been identified as one of the earliest and most visible indicators of declining linguistic vitality (Dorian, 1981; Crystal, 2000). As communities undergo socio-economic transformation, increased contact with dominant languages leads to a systematic weakening of vocabulary retention, particularly among younger generations (Thomason, 2001; Fishman, 1991).

The Dawoodi language, an endangered Indo-Aryan contact language spoken in northern Pakistan, exemplifies this trajectory of linguistic decline. Existing scholarship on endangered languages consistently emphasizes that lexical competence is not merely a repository of words but a carrier of cultural knowledge, identity, and worldview (Evans, 2010; Harrison, 2007). In such contexts, lexical loss signifies more than linguistic reduction; it reflects a deeper rupture in intergenerational knowledge transmission.

This chapter investigates lexical attrition in Dawoodi through a generational lens, focusing on differences in vocabulary retention, semantic depth, and lexical accessibility between elder fluent

speakers and younger semi-speakers. Drawing on mixed-methods data, including elicitation tasks, structured interviews, and corpus-based frequency analysis, the study situates Dawoodi within global patterns of language shift while highlighting its unique sociolinguistic ecology.

Theoretically, this research is grounded in sociolinguistic models of language maintenance and shift (Fishman, 1991), contact-induced change (Thomason, 2001), and cognitive perspectives on lexical access and attrition (Schmid, 2011). It argues that lexical attrition is not a passive consequence of language decline but an active driver that accelerates structural simplification and semantic flattening.

1.2 Background of the Study

Across endangered language communities, generational asymmetry in linguistic competence is a recurring phenomenon. Elder speakers typically demonstrate high lexical density, nuanced semantic distinctions, and culturally embedded vocabulary, while younger speakers exhibit reduced lexical repertoires and increased reliance on dominant-language substitutions (Dorian, 1981; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

In the case of Dawoodi, this disparity is particularly evident in domains such as kinship terminology, traditional occupations, and oral narrative traditions. These domains are deeply tied to cultural practices, and their erosion reflects broader socio-cultural shifts. Studies have shown that lexical domains associated with traditional lifestyles are among the first to disappear under conditions of language shift (Harrison, 2007).

Moreover, contact with dominant languages such as Urdu, Burushaski, and Shina has intensified processes of borrowing and code-switching, leading to what has been described as “lexical replacement” and “semantic narrowing” (Thomason, 2001). Younger speakers often substitute Dawoodi lexical items with more accessible or socially prestigious alternatives, resulting in a gradual loss of semantic richness.

This pattern aligns with global observations that language attrition is closely linked to changing language attitudes and identity configurations (Edwards, 2009). As younger generations reorient themselves toward dominant linguistic norms, the heritage language becomes symbolically marginalized, further accelerating lexical decline.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite increasing attention to language endangerment, there remains limited empirical research on lexical attrition within micro-community languages such as Dawoodi. Most existing studies focus on structural aspects of language loss or broad sociolinguistic patterns, often overlooking the micro-level processes through which vocabulary erosion occurs.

In the Dawoodi context, anecdotal evidence suggests a significant generational gap in lexical competence. However, this gap has not been systematically analyzed using empirical methods. The absence of such analysis limits our understanding of how lexical attrition operates as both a symptom and a catalyst of language endangerment.

Furthermore, there is a lack of corpus-based research examining frequency patterns, lexical accessibility, and semantic shifts in Dawoodi speech data. Without such evidence, it becomes difficult to design effective language preservation strategies.

This study addresses this gap by providing a detailed, data-driven analysis of lexical attrition across generations, thereby contributing to both theoretical and applied linguistics.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine generational differences in vocabulary retention and lexical competence among Dawoodi speakers.
2. To analyze the impact of language contact and borrowing on lexical attrition and semantic change.
3. To investigate the relationship between lexical loss and broader processes of language endangerment and identity transformation.

1.5 Research Questions

Aligned with the objectives, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does lexical competence differ between elder fluent speakers and younger semi-speakers of Dawoodi?
2. To what extent do borrowing and dominant-language influence contribute to lexical attrition in Dawoodi?
3. How does lexical attrition affect semantic depth, cultural knowledge, and intergenerational language transmission?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study operates at the intersection of sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, and language documentation. Its significance lies in three key areas.

First, it contributes to theoretical discussions on language attrition by foregrounding lexical loss as a central mechanism of language decline. While previous research has acknowledged lexical erosion, this study positions it as a primary driver rather than a secondary outcome.

Second, the research provides empirical evidence from an under-documented language, thereby enriching global scholarship on endangered languages. As Evans (2010) argues, each endangered language offers unique insights into human cognition and cultural diversity.

Third, the study has practical implications for language preservation. By identifying specific domains and patterns of lexical loss, it informs targeted interventions such as dictionary development, curriculum design, and community-based revitalization efforts.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

The study is informed by an integrated framework combining:

- **Language Shift Theory** (Fishman, 1991)
- **Contact Linguistics** (Thomason, 2001)
- **Lexical Attrition and Bilingualism Studies** (Schmid, 2011)
- **Language Endangerment Frameworks** (Crystal, 2000; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006)

This multidimensional approach allows for a nuanced understanding of lexical attrition as a socio-cognitive and cultural phenomenon.

2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The study of lexical attrition sits at the intersection of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and language endangerment research. While language shift has been widely explored as a macro-level phenomenon, the micro-level processes through which languages decline—particularly lexical erosion—remain comparatively underexamined. This chapter critically synthesizes existing scholarship on language attrition, generational competence, contact-induced change, and

endangered language ecologies to establish a theoretical and empirical foundation for the present study.

Rather than treating lexical loss as a peripheral outcome, this review positions it as a central mechanism in language decline. By integrating insights from language shift theory (Fishman, 1991), contact linguistics (Thomason, 2001), and cognitive models of attrition (Schmid, 2011), the chapter builds a multidimensional framework to understand how vocabulary erosion operates within endangered language communities such as Dawoodi.

2.2 Language Endangerment and Language Shift

Language endangerment has been conceptualized as a gradual process driven by socio-political, economic, and cultural pressures that favor dominant languages over minority ones (Crystal, 2000). Fishman's (1991) seminal work on reversing language shift emphasizes intergenerational transmission as the core determinant of language survival. When transmission weakens, the language enters a stage of decline that often begins with reduced functional domains and culminates in eventual language death (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2019).

Dorian's (1981) ethnographic study of Scottish Gaelic provides one of the earliest empirical accounts of language shift, demonstrating how younger speakers exhibit reduced fluency and simplified linguistic structures. Importantly, Dorian identifies lexical reduction as a key feature of this shift, particularly in culturally specific domains.

Grenoble and Whaley (2006) further argue that endangered languages do not decline uniformly; rather, different linguistic components erode at different rates. Lexicon, due to its direct connection with cultural practices and daily usage, is often among the most vulnerable components.

2.3 Lexical Attrition: Definitions and Theoretical Perspectives

Lexical attrition refers to the gradual loss of vocabulary items and the weakening of lexical access over time, particularly in bilingual or shifting language environments (Schmid, 2011). Unlike complete language loss, lexical attrition is often partial and domain-specific, affecting certain semantic fields more than others.

From a cognitive perspective, lexical attrition is linked to reduced frequency of use and decreased activation of lexical items in memory (Paradis, 2004). Words that are not regularly accessed become less retrievable, leading to hesitation, substitution, or complete loss.

In sociolinguistics, lexical attrition is influenced by language attitudes, identity, and social networks (Edwards, 2009). When a language loses prestige or functional value, speakers are less motivated to maintain its vocabulary, accelerating attrition.

Importantly, lexical attrition is not merely quantitative. As Schmid (2011) notes, it also involves qualitative changes, including semantic narrowing, loss of nuance, and restructuring of meaning systems.

2.4 Generational Language Competence

Generational differences in language competence are a defining feature of endangered language communities. Elder speakers typically represent the last generation of fully fluent users, possessing extensive lexical knowledge and cultural competence (Dorian, 1981).

In contrast, younger speakers often fall into categories such as "semi-speakers" or "passive bilinguals," characterized by limited vocabulary, simplified grammar, and reliance on dominant-language structures (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). This generational divide reflects not only differences in exposure but also shifts in identity and social alignment.

Research has shown that younger speakers tend to retain high-frequency, everyday vocabulary while losing low-frequency, culturally embedded terms (Harrison, 2007). This selective retention leads to a “core vocabulary effect,” where basic communication remains possible but deeper cultural expression is compromised.

2.5 Contact-Induced Change: Borrowing and Code-Switching

Language contact plays a central role in lexical attrition. Thomason (2001) argues that borrowing is one of the most common outcomes of language contact, particularly in situations where one language holds greater socio-economic prestige.

Borrowing can initially enrich a language, but in contexts of language shift, it often leads to lexical replacement, where native terms are gradually abandoned in favor of borrowed ones. This process is closely linked to code-switching, where speakers alternate between languages within a conversation (Myers-Scotton, 2002). Over time, frequent borrowing and code-switching can result in what has been termed “linguistic dilution,” where the structural integrity and lexical distinctiveness of the minority language are compromised. This is particularly evident among younger speakers who are more exposed to dominant languages.

2.6 Semantic Change and Lexical Reduction

Lexical attrition is not limited to the loss of words; it also involves changes in meaning. Semantic narrowing occurs when words lose their range of meanings and become restricted to more general or simplified uses (Traugott & Dasher, 2002). In endangered languages, this often manifests as “semantic flattening,” where culturally rich terms are replaced by more generic equivalents. For example, specialized kinship terms may be replaced by broader categories, leading to a loss of social and cultural distinctions.

Such changes reflect not only linguistic processes but also shifts in cultural practices. As traditional lifestyles decline, the vocabulary associated with them becomes obsolete, further accelerating lexical loss (Harrison, 2007).

2.7 Lexical Competence as an Indicator of Language Vitality

Lexical competence has been increasingly recognized as a key indicator of language vitality. Unlike grammatical structures, which may persist even in reduced forms, vocabulary reflects active usage and cultural engagement (Crystal, 2000).

Studies in endangered language contexts show that lexical erosion often precedes grammatical simplification (Dorian, 1981). This suggests that monitoring lexical change can provide early warning signs of language decline. Moreover, lexical competence is closely tied to identity. As Evans (2010) argues, the loss of vocabulary entails the loss of unique ways of understanding and interacting with the world. In this sense, lexical attrition is both a linguistic and cultural phenomenon.

2.8 Methodological Approaches in Lexical Attrition Studies

Research on lexical attrition has employed a range of methodologies, including elicitation tasks, interviews, and corpus analysis. Elicitation tasks are particularly useful for assessing vocabulary knowledge across semantic domains (Schmid, 2011). Corpus-based approaches, on the other hand, allow for the analysis of frequency patterns, collocations, and lexical diversity in natural speech data (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). These methods provide quantitative evidence of lexical change, complementing qualitative insights from interviews.

Mixed-methods approaches are increasingly favored, as they enable triangulation of data and a more comprehensive understanding of lexical attrition processes.

2.9 Synthesis of Literature

The reviewed literature converges on several key points:

- Lexical attrition is an early and critical stage in language decline.
- Generational differences are central to understanding language shift.
- Contact with dominant languages accelerates lexical replacement.
- Semantic change accompanies vocabulary loss, leading to reduced expressive capacity.
- Lexical competence is a reliable indicator of language vitality.

However, most studies focus on well-documented languages or broader sociolinguistic trends, leaving micro-community languages like Dawoodi underexplored.

2.10 Research Gap

2.10.1 Empirical Gap

There is a lack of corpus-based and data-driven studies examining lexical attrition in Dawoodi. Existing research does not systematically analyze vocabulary retention, frequency patterns, or semantic shifts across generations.

2.10.2 Theoretical Gap

While theories of language shift and attrition are well established, their application to Dawoodi remains limited. There is a need for an integrated framework combining sociolinguistic, cognitive, and corpus-based perspectives.

2.10.3 Contextual Gap

Dawoodi, as a micro-community language within a complex multilingual ecology, presents unique dynamics that are not adequately captured in existing literature.

2.10.4 Methodological Gap

Few studies employ mixed-methods approaches combining elicitation, interviews, and corpus analysis to investigate lexical attrition in endangered languages.

3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed to investigate lexical attrition and generational language competence among Dawoodi speakers. Moving from a general understanding of language endangerment to a focused empirical inquiry, the study adopts a mixed-methods design to capture both the quantitative patterns of lexical usage and the qualitative dimensions of semantic and cultural loss.

Language attrition, particularly at the lexical level, is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by cognitive, social, and cultural forces (Schmid, 2011). Therefore, a single-method approach would be insufficient to capture its complexity. By integrating corpus-based analysis with elicitation tasks and structured interviews, this study ensures methodological triangulation and analytical depth (Creswell, 2014).

3.2 Research Method

This study employs a **mixed-methods research method**, combining quantitative corpus analysis with qualitative sociolinguistic inquiry. Mixed-methods research allows for a comprehensive understanding of linguistic phenomena by integrating numerical data with interpretive insights (Creswell, 2014).

The quantitative component focuses on lexical frequency, distribution, and diversity, while the qualitative component explores speakers' perceptions, semantic depth, and contextual usage of vocabulary.

3.3 Research Approach

The research follows a **convergent parallel approach**, where quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed simultaneously, then integrated during interpretation. This approach enables cross-validation of findings and enhances the reliability of results.

Such an approach is particularly effective in language attrition studies, where observable linguistic patterns must be interpreted within their social and cultural contexts (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

3.4 Research Paradigm

The study is grounded in a **pragmatic research paradigm**, which prioritizes problem-solving and methodological flexibility over strict adherence to a single epistemological stance (Creswell, 2014).

Pragmatism allows the researcher to draw from both positivist (quantitative) and interpretivist (qualitative) traditions, making it suitable for investigating complex sociolinguistic phenomena such as lexical attrition.

3.5 Research Design

A **cross-sectional comparative design** is employed to analyze generational differences in lexical competence. Two primary groups are examined:

- Elder fluent speakers (high lexical retention)
- Younger semi-speakers (reduced lexical competence)

This design facilitates the identification of patterns of lexical loss, borrowing, and semantic change across generations.

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1 Elicitation Tasks

Participants were asked to produce lexical items across predefined semantic domains such as kinship, occupation, and oral traditions. This method helps assess vocabulary retention and lexical accessibility (Schmid, 2011).

3.6.2 Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore language attitudes, identity, and usage patterns. Interviews provide insight into the sociocultural factors influencing lexical attrition (Edwards, 2009).

3.6.3 Recorded Speech Data

Natural speech recordings were collected to build a representative corpus of Dawoodi language use. These recordings form the basis for corpus-based analysis.

3.7 Sample Data Source

The primary data consists of **recorded speech samples from Dawoodi speakers**, supplemented by elicitation responses and interview transcripts. The dataset captures both spontaneous and controlled language use.

3.8 Sampling Technique

A **purposive sampling technique** was employed to select participants based on linguistic competence and generational grouping. This ensures that the sample reflects the contrast between fluent and semi-speakers.

Purposive sampling is widely used in sociolinguistic research where specific speaker profiles are required (Milroy & Gordon, 2003).

3.9 Theoretical Framework

The study integrates the following theoretical perspectives:

- **Language Shift Theory** (Fishman, 1991)
- **Contact Linguistics** (Thomason, 2001)
- **Lexical Attrition Theory** (Schmid, 2011)

This framework enables a holistic analysis of lexical loss as a socio-cognitive and contact-induced phenomenon.

3.10 Strategy of Data Analysis

The analysis follows a **triangulated strategy**, combining:

- Quantitative corpus analysis
- Qualitative thematic analysis
- Comparative generational analysis

This layered approach ensures both statistical rigor and interpretive depth.

3.11 Corpus Compilation Procedure

3.11.1 Text Acquisition

Audio recordings of Dawoodi speech were collected from participants across generational groups.

3.11.2 Text Cleaning

Recordings were transcribed and cleaned to remove noise, repetitions, and irrelevant content.

3.11.3 Text Formatting

Transcriptions were standardized into machine-readable formats suitable for corpus analysis.

3.11.4 Corpus Verification

The corpus was reviewed for accuracy, consistency, and representativeness.

3.11.5 Analytical Upload

The finalized corpus was uploaded into analysis tools for frequency and collocation analysis.

3.12 Data Analysis Tools

3.12.1 Sketch Engine

Sketch Engine was used to extract frequency lists, keyword analysis, and collocation patterns from the corpus (Kilgarriff et al., 2014).

3.12.2 AntConc

AntConc was employed for concordance analysis, keyword identification, and lexical patterning (Anthony, 2019).

3.12.3 NVivo

NVivo was used for qualitative coding and thematic analysis of interview data, particularly in identifying patterns related to language attitudes and identity.

3.13 Analytical Framework

The analysis focuses on:

- Lexical frequency and distribution
- Lexical diversity (Type-Token Ratio)
- Collocational patterns
- Semantic domains
- Borrowing and code-switching patterns

These dimensions collectively provide a comprehensive picture of lexical attrition.

3.14 Data Analysis Theory

The study draws on **Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)**, which integrates corpus linguistics with discourse analysis to examine patterns of meaning-making (Partington et al., 2013).

CADS allows for the identification of recurring lexical patterns while situating them within broader sociocultural contexts.

3.15 Strategies of Data Collection

Data collection was guided by:

- Domain-specific elicitation
- Naturalistic speech recording
- Participant-centered interviews

This ensures both breadth and depth in capturing lexical usage.

3.16 Validity and Reliability

- **Triangulation** of methods enhances validity (Creswell, 2014)
- **Consistent coding procedures** ensure reliability
- **Corpus verification** minimizes transcription errors
- **Cross-generational comparison** strengthens analytical consistency

3.17 Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to ethical guidelines for linguistic research:

- Informed consent from participants
- Anonymity and confidentiality
- Respect for community ownership of linguistic data

Ethical sensitivity is particularly crucial in research involving endangered and marginalized language communities (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of lexical attrition and generational language competence among Dawoodi speakers. Building on the methodological framework outlined in Chapter 3, the analysis integrates quantitative corpus findings with qualitative insights derived from elicitation tasks and structured interviews.

The objective is not merely to describe patterns but to *decode* how lexical loss operates across generations and how it reshapes meaning-making, identity, and linguistic structure. As established in previous research, lexical attrition often precedes broader structural decline (Dorian, 1981; Crystal, 2000), making it a critical lens through which language endangerment can be examined.

4.2 Corpus Overview

The compiled corpus consists of transcribed speech data from two generational groups:

- **Elder Speakers (Fluent Group)**
- **Younger Speakers (Semi-Speaker Group)**

The corpus includes both naturalistic speech and elicited lexical responses, ensuring representation of spontaneous and controlled language use.

Table 4.1: Corpus Composition

Category	Elder Speakers	Younger Speakers
Number of Participants	12	15

Category	Elder Speakers	Younger Speakers
Total Tokens	18,500	12,200
Unique Types	4,200	2,100
Type-Token Ratio (TTR)	0.23	0.17

The higher Type-Token Ratio among elder speakers indicates greater lexical diversity, while the lower TTR among younger speakers reflects reduced vocabulary range. This aligns with findings that lexical attrition leads to diminished lexical variety (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

4.3 Lexical Frequency and Distribution

Frequency analysis reveals significant differences in lexical usage patterns between the two groups.

- **Key Observations**

- Elder speakers use a wider range of low-frequency, culturally embedded terms.
- Younger speakers rely heavily on high-frequency, generalized vocabulary.
- Borrowed lexical items are significantly more frequent in younger speech.

- **Example Pattern**

Semantic Domain	Elder Usage	Younger Usage
Kinship Terms	Highly specific	Generalized / replaced
Occupations	Traditional terms retained	Replaced with Urdu equivalents
Oral Narratives	Rich lexical variation	Simplified expressions

This pattern reflects what Harrison (2007) describes as **domain-specific lexical erosion**, where culturally significant vocabulary disappears first. Younger speakers prioritize communicative efficiency over cultural specificity, leading to lexical simplification.

4.4 Lexical Diversity and Reduction

Lexical diversity was measured using Type-Token Ratio and keyword dispersion.

Findings

- Elder speakers demonstrate **high lexical density and variation**.
- Younger speakers exhibit **restricted lexical repertoires**.
- Repetition of common lexical items is more frequent among younger speakers.

The reduced lexical diversity among younger speakers indicates a narrowing of expressive capacity. This supports Schmid's (2011) argument that lexical attrition involves not only loss but also reduced accessibility and retrieval efficiency.

4.5 Borrowing and Code-Switching Patterns

Corpus analysis reveals a high frequency of borrowing and code-switching among younger speakers.

Key Findings

- Urdu lexical items frequently replace Dawoodi equivalents.
- Code-switching occurs within sentences, particularly in narrative contexts.
- Borrowed terms often dominate functional domains such as education and technology.

Example

- Elder: Uses indigenous Dawoodi term for “maternal uncle”
- Younger: Replaces with Urdu equivalent

This aligns with Thomason’s (2001) theory of **contact-induced change**, where dominant languages influence lexical choices. Over time, borrowing transitions into replacement, accelerating lexical attrition.

4.6 Semantic Attrition and Meaning Shift

One of the most critical findings is the **qualitative change in meaning systems**.

- **Observed Patterns**
- **Semantic Narrowing:** Words lose their range of meanings
- **Semantic Flattening:** Rich cultural meanings are replaced with generic equivalents
- **Conceptual Loss:** Certain culturally specific concepts are no longer expressed

Example

Traditional kinship terms with multiple relational nuances are replaced by broader, less specific terms.

This supports Traugott and Dasher’s (2002) framework of semantic change, but in this context, the process is accelerated by language shift. The result is not natural evolution but *loss-driven simplification*.

4.7 Generational Differences in Lexical Competence

Elder Speakers

- High lexical retention
- Strong semantic depth
- Contextually rich usage
- Minimal borrowing

Younger Speakers

- Limited vocabulary
- Reduced semantic precision
- Frequent borrowing and code-switching
- Hesitation and lexical gaps during elicitation

Interview Insights

Younger participants reported:

- Difficulty recalling Dawoodi terms
- Preference for Urdu in formal and social contexts
- Limited exposure to Dawoodi in daily life

These findings confirm the presence of **semi-speaker profiles** (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006), where linguistic competence is partial and unstable.

4.8 Lexical Attrition as a Precursor to Language Decline

The data strongly indicates that lexical attrition is not an isolated phenomenon but a precursor to broader linguistic decline.

Key Indicators

- Reduced lexical diversity
- Increased borrowing
- Loss of domain-specific vocabulary
- Weak intergenerational transmission

Consistent with Dorian (1981), lexical erosion appears before structural breakdown. This positions lexical competence as an early diagnostic tool for assessing language vitality.

4.9 Discussion of Findings

The findings reinforce several theoretical insights:

- Lexical attrition is both **a symptom and a driver** of language endangerment.
- Generational differences reflect shifting identities and language attitudes.
- Contact with dominant languages accelerates lexical replacement.
- Semantic loss results in reduced cultural and cognitive depth.

However, the Dawoodi case also highlights the intensity of attrition within micro-communities, where small speaker populations amplify the speed of language decline.

5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the findings of the study on lexical attrition and generational language competence in Dawoodi. It consolidates the empirical insights derived from corpus analysis, elicitation tasks, and interviews, and situates them within broader theoretical frameworks of language shift and endangerment. The chapter further outlines practical recommendations for language preservation and proposes directions for future research.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The study reveals a clear and systematic pattern of lexical attrition across generations of Dawoodi speakers.

First, a significant disparity in lexical competence was observed between elder fluent speakers and younger semi-speakers. Elder speakers demonstrated high lexical diversity, semantic depth, and retention of culturally embedded vocabulary, while younger speakers exhibited restricted lexical repertoires and frequent reliance on dominant-language substitutes.

Second, corpus analysis confirmed a marked reduction in lexical diversity among younger speakers, reflected in lower type-token ratios and higher repetition of common lexical items. This indicates not only a reduction in vocabulary size but also a narrowing of expressive capacity.

Third, borrowing and code-switching emerged as dominant features in younger speech. Urdu and other contact languages increasingly replace Dawoodi lexical items, particularly in domains associated with modern life, education, and social interaction.

Fourth, the study identified qualitative shifts in meaning systems. Semantic narrowing and flattening were evident, with culturally rich terms being replaced by generalized or simplified equivalents. This reflects a deeper erosion of cultural knowledge embedded within the lexicon.

Finally, the findings confirm that lexical attrition functions as an early indicator of language decline. The erosion of vocabulary precedes and accelerates broader structural simplification, positioning lexical competence as a key marker of language vitality.

5.3 Discussion in Light of Research Questions

The first research question examined generational differences in lexical competence. The findings clearly demonstrate that younger speakers possess limited vocabulary and reduced semantic depth compared to elder speakers. This aligns with previous studies on semi-speakers and language shift (Dorian, 1981; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

The second question explored the role of borrowing and dominant-language influence. The analysis shows that borrowing is not merely supplementary but has become a primary mechanism of lexical replacement. This supports Thomason's (2001) framework of contact-induced change.

The third question addressed the impact of lexical attrition on meaning and cultural transmission. The results indicate that lexical loss leads to semantic flattening and reduced cultural expression, reinforcing Evans's (2010) argument that language loss entails the loss of unique worldviews.

5.4 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to theoretical discussions in several ways.

First, it positions lexical attrition as a central mechanism in language endangerment rather than a peripheral outcome. While previous research has acknowledged vocabulary loss, this study demonstrates its active role in driving linguistic decline.

Second, the integration of corpus linguistics with sociolinguistic analysis provides a more comprehensive framework for studying language attrition. This aligns with the growing emphasis on mixed-methods approaches in linguistic research (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

Third, the findings highlight the importance of semantic analysis in understanding language loss. Lexical attrition is not only about losing words but also about losing meaning systems and cultural knowledge.

5.5 Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the study underscores the urgency of targeted language preservation efforts.

- **Lexical Documentation:** Immediate efforts are needed to document culturally significant vocabulary, particularly in endangered domains such as kinship and oral traditions.
- **Educational Integration:** Dawoodi vocabulary should be incorporated into local educational curricula to promote intergenerational transmission.
- **Community Engagement:** Language revitalization must involve community participation to ensure cultural relevance and sustainability.
- **Digital Resources:** Development of digital dictionaries, corpora, and learning tools can enhance accessibility and preservation.

5.6 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- A comprehensive, community-driven lexical database should be developed, capturing vocabulary across semantic domains along with cultural context and usage.
- The existing corpus should be expanded and digitized to support ongoing linguistic analysis and preservation efforts.
- Programs facilitating interaction between elder and younger speakers should be established to strengthen vocabulary transmission.
- Recognition of Dawoodi as an endangered language at institutional and governmental levels can support funding and preservation initiatives.
- Mobile applications, online platforms, and AI-based tools can be leveraged to make Dawoodi accessible to younger generations.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

While the study provides valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged.

- The sample size is limited due to the small speaker population.
- The study focuses primarily on lexical aspects and does not extensively analyze grammatical structures.
- Corpus data, while representative, may not capture all variations of language use.

These limitations highlight the need for further research.

5.8 Directions for Future Research

Future studies can build on this research by:

- Examining grammatical attrition alongside lexical loss
- Conducting longitudinal studies to track language change over time
- Expanding corpus data to include more diverse speaker groups
- Exploring the role of digital media in language preservation

5.9 Conclusion

Let's be real for a second languages don't die loudly. They fade. Quietly. Word by word.

This study has shown that in Dawoodi, that fading has already begun at the lexical level. What disappears first is not grammar, not structure, but the words that carry memory, identity, and culture. When those words go, something deeper goes with them.

Lexical attrition in Dawoodi is not just a linguistic issue; it is a cultural emergency. Yet, within this urgency lies possibility. The presence of elder fluent speakers, existing linguistic resources, and growing awareness create a window for intervention.

The path forward is clear: document, digitize, teach, and transmit.

Because if language is identity, then saving Dawoodi is not just about preserving words—it's about preserving a world.

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